

Link to Article: <http://ac360.blogs.cnn.com/2010/01/15/tps-must-be-granted-now-for-haitian-nationals-in-the-u-s/>

Editor's Note: *Congressman Alcee L. Hastings is Vice Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a senior member of the House Rules Committee, and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.*

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Special to AC360°

The Haitian people are certainly no strangers to adversity. Haitians, both in Haiti and in our own country, have long suffered through natural destruction, persistent poverty, repressive regimes, and the inequitable policies of the United States. While I certainly applaud our government's generous contributions of humanitarian aid and the administration's decision to temporarily halt deportations, we must go further. This most recent disaster emphasizes the vital need for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitian nationals currently residing in the United States.

It is not enough for Haitians to know they will not be sent back until a future, arbitrary date. They must be afforded some protection and allowed to work while their nation regains some semblance of stability. TPS designation temporarily halts deportations and grants permission to work, allowing Haitians currently in the United States to contribute to their nation's recovery until such time when it is safe for them to return home.

The Haitian Diaspora has always played a pivotal role in assisting Haiti. Many Haitians send remittances to support family and others travel home to lend their expertise toward economic development and humanitarian efforts. Designating Haiti under TPS status would preserve and increase these remittances – currently totaling approximately a third of Haiti's GDP – which are vital for welfare, survival, and recovery.

There are currently five countries protected under the TPS provision: Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Somalia, and Sudan. In the cases of Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador, TPS was granted in response to destructive natural disasters. For the past ten years in the cases of Nicaragua and Honduras and the past seven in the case of El Salvador, the United States has rightfully acknowledged and supported the efforts of these nations to return to a sense of normalcy by granting and extending their TPS. Meanwhile, at the same time and under similarly

dire situations, Haitian migrants have not received similar treatment.

By refusing to give Haiti the TPS designation, our inequitable immigration policies continue to send the message that the safety of Haitian lives is not a priority compared to that of Salvadoran, Honduran, or Sudanese lives. We must act to change this perception. Our immigration policies must reflect fairness and treat Haitians equally to others whose deportations are suspended and who are allowed to work and support their families back home.

Some argue that granting TPS will lead to a mass exodus from the island. I do not believe that to be true. TPS only affects those who are already in the United States, and there has been no evidence of a similar migration when other countries have been granted TPS or when there have been other changes to immigration policies affecting Haitians.

However, taking action is even more imperative, because this tragedy did not occur halfway around the world. Haiti and the United States are connected not only by geographic proximity but by an inextricably linked history that spans over 200 years. It is simply inhumane that the most prosperous nation on Earth cannot provide this simple form of relief to its our struggling neighbor and friend.

For years, the Haitian people have lived in misery beyond human understanding. How much more suffering must they endure before the United States sees it fit to act? It is not only irresponsible, but immoral, to continue to deny Haitians TPS.

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